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UNMIK

SUBJECT: RETURNS AND MISSING PERSONS FOREVER LINKED IN
WESTERN KOSOVO

Sensitive But Unclassified; Protect Accordingly.

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. Many ethnic Albanians from parts of Kosovo that were subjected to violent ethnic cleansing during the war do not give much thought to the return of their ethnic Serb neighbors, and they doubt that any of the Serbs want to come back. For these Albanians any reconciliation with returning Serbs would have to include the full cooperation of the returnees in the identification and prosecution of those responsible for specific atrocities. Albanian leaders from two southwestern Kosovo villages, ethnically mixed before the war but completely Albanian since a failed Serbian attempt at ethnic cleansing in 1999, are coming to grips with their terrible legacy as the bodies of those killed are slowly found and returned from Serbia. UNMIK has devoted alarmingly few resources to pursuit of these cases. In Post's view, the adjudication of however many of the cases of missing persons prove to be prosecutable would not guarantee ethnic reconciliation in Kosovo, but failure to prosecute at least some of these cases would make the goal of reconciliation all but unreachable in many parts of Kosovo. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) Forty-five individuals whose remains were returned recently from Serbia were buried in a March 26 ceremony attended by 2,000, including Prime Minister Agim Ceku, in the formerly ethnically-mixed village of Krushe e Madhe near Prizren in southwestern Kosovo. On March 26, 1999, 363 men and adolescent boys from Krushe e Madhe and Krushe e Vogel (less than a kilometer away) disappeared after various Serb forces massed in the area. With the 45 burials on March 26, 107 of the 363 are established as dead and their remains have been returned to their families. Two men who survived the 1999 events testified during the Hague prosecution of Slobodan Milosevic that regular Serbian army forces, Serbian police, and some local Serbs together shot all the Krushe males after the women and children had been force marched from the villages. This expulsion-and-murder method of ethnic cleansing was evidently repeated in several other villages in western and southwestern Kosovo.

13. (SBU) The entire ethnic Serb populations of the two Krushe

villages fled after the March-June 1999 NATO bombing and no Serbs have returned. Seven years after these events, the annual commemorations in both villages have taken on a strange aspect of celebration mixed with grief. In this context E/P chief, attending this year's services, found villagers more than willing to discuss what they see as slim prospects for ethnic reconciliation in the area. Rexhep Hoti, who was well known to USOP during his time as a political advisor to former Prime Minister Bajram Rexhepi, grew up in Krushe e Madhe and counted four cousins among the 45 victims buried on March 26. Hoti left the village well before the war but visits often and said his relatives there were hit hard by the repatriation of the remains because many of them had been clinging to an irrational belief that their missing were held captive in secret camps in Serbia. He said that many of his cousins even now insist that Harvard-educated Ukshin Hoti, the pride of the extended family, is alive in Serbia.

¶4. (SBU) Hoti said his Krushe e Madhe relatives have never seriously considered the idea of Serbs returning to the village, adding that he could not imagine that any of them would want to. He said that most Serb properties were destroyed in June 1999 when surviving Albanians returned from their forced exile. Although Hoti thanked E/P chief for attending the commemoration, he noted that there was virtually no other international or UNMIK presence, a circumstance he sees as typical of an international community he believes has little interest in finding justice for the victims of Serbian aggression. E/P chief replied that his own presence was unannounced and that other international representatives likely stayed away so as not to intrude on the privacy of the families.

¶5. (SBU) E/P chief also talked at the commemoration with
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Agron Limani, a frequent USOP contact who teaches computer science in a Prizrin high school and who grew up in Krushe e Vogel where he still lives. He was away from the village on March 26, 1999 but lost his brother that day. He now heads an association of the families of missing persons and particularly tries to generate employment for the wives of missing persons. Limani has no illusions about the fate of his brother and devotes much of his free time to trying to motivate the international community to investigate and prosecute these cases.

¶6. (SBU) Limani knew virtually all the adult Serbs from both villages. He has carefully interviewed all the women who saw events unfold from March 24, 1999, when he said Serbian troops and police first arrived, until March 26 when the Albanian women and children were marched out. He also talks regularly with the few men who survived. Limani believes his research reveals a fairly full picture of those local Serbs who were complicit in the massacre and those who merely tolerated it. None of them tried to stop it as far as he can determine.

¶7. (SBU) Like Hoti, Limani can't imagine that any Krushe Serbs want to return. He is open to the possibility and said he would welcome back some of the Serbs with whom he grew up. First, though, he says there must be justice. He brought up the reconciliation process that has unfolded in South Africa and noted that reconciliation there included a great many prosecutions in courts of law, something that has not happened in Kosovo. (COMMENT. Limani seems to be unaware that confessions of guilt were generally followed by pardons in the South African reconciliation process. END COMMENT.) He sees the Krushe e Vogel case as a very simple one involving eye witnesses, recovered bodies, and the positive identification of several of the alleged perpetrators.

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT. The mandate of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia to develop new cases having expired, UNMIK is the sole authority in Kosovo with

jurisdiction over war-related crimes and missing persons cases. International police and prosecutors have some 5,000 war-related files, most of which derive from 50 or so incidents. Most of these cases allege Serb-on-Albanian violence, but some allege Albanians as perpetrators and Serbs or Albanians as victims. USOP has long pushed UNMIK to wade through these files with a view to prosecuting those cases that UNMIK DOJ deems prosecutable. UNMIK has shown little interest. The briefest of drop-bys to Krushe or area villages would amply demonstrate the obstacles confronting international community efforts to encourage returns without dealing with missing persons cases. END COMMENT.

19. (SBU) Post clears this cable in its entirety for release to UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari.
GOLDBERG